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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000883

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMA PRESENTS UNITY CHALLENGE TO EU 25

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1B. DUBLIN 641

Classified By: DCM Jane B. Fort for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Irish government concerns about the continuing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the lack of participation by pro-democracy groups at the constitutional convention will not result in public statements soon. Ireland continues to work indirectly through its Asian partners. Upcoming Asia-EU meetings (ASEM) present difficult options for the EU 25 on whether, and how, to attend meetings where the ASEAN side expects to seat Burma as a quid pro quo for meeting the formally enlarged EU. End Summary.

12. (U) Poloff delivered demarche based on Reftel A to Caitriona Ingoldsby of the Asia and Oceania Section of the DFA on June 8. DFA principals who cover Burma have been traveling. Ingoldsby promised to share points with Cliona Manahan-Leslie, Director of the office, and Niall Brady, member of her staff, who are now in Brussels for an EU Asia directors meeting July 9 in the run up to the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting next week.

13. (C) Cautious Ireland, equally concerned by the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the exclusion of pro-democracy groups from the convention, has no plans to comment publicly on Burma yet. Irish influence and access to the Burmese government is limited and Ireland's experience is that "shouting loudly by the EU drives Burma into its shell," Ingoldsby said, so Ireland has worked indirectly through Asian partners. Demarches and parallel efforts by Irish special envoy Ambassador Robert Campbell in capitals have borne no fruit and the lack of progress from Rangoon has "surprised everybody" and "made constructive engagement difficult," Ingoldsby complained.

14. (C) The calendar will force more overt EU action. The crux of the issue is the bloc admission of the ten new EU states to ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting), which the EU expects, versus the bloc admission of the three new ASEAN states, Laos, Cambodia and Burma, which ASEAN demands as a quid pro quo. The last ASEM meeting of Foreign Ministers in Dublin in April (reftel B) adjourned hopeful that anticipated progress on Burma would ease the expansion issue. Now disappointed, the EU, formally 25 States since May 1, feels it faces its first test of unity, Ingoldsby revealed.

15. (C) Ingoldsby said that GAERC will ponder Burma and the ASEM dilemma it presents. The EU needs a common position on group participation before ASEM ministerials in July and September in the Netherlands and the next ASEM Summit October 8-9 in Hanoi; several options seem to be on the table:

a) The EU refuses to meet with ASEM if Burma is included. Ingoldsby said the EU would work hard to avoid this outcome so as to maintain the larger good of the ASEM meetings.

b) The EU goes to the ASEM meeting as 15, thereby forcing ASEAN to exclude Burma and the other two. Ingoldsby refused to be drawn on EU discussions of this difficult option, saying it was "up to partners." She noted that the simmering discussions of a "two tier Europe" would make this option most difficult for the new EU 10 to accept as "an awful precedent so early on."

c) The EU goes to the ASEM meeting as the troika, with ASEAN sending some form of parallel representation. Ingoldsby agreed that this option might formally preserve the ASEM format while keeping the Burma issue on the table.

d) The EU goes as 25, ASEAN comes with Burma, and the issue is mooted.

COMMENT

16. (C) ASEAN ministers are reportedly as surprised and disappointed by current events in Burma as the Irish, who clearly feel stymied. Irish quiet diplomacy, dependent on time, is bumping up against constraints imposed by formal ASEM meeting calendars. Excluding the newly-admitted EU 10 from ASEM meetings, to make a point on Burma, seems unlikely

to gain consensus among the EU 25. So it remains a question of whether the EU sees its broader relationships with Asia bound up in ASEM or whether the ASEM vehicle will be sacrificed to make a point on Burma.

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